United Nations A/C.5/56/SR.27

General Assembly
Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
14 January 2002
English
Original: French

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 27th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 9 November 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Effah-Apenteng ..... (Ghana)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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01-62961 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 127: United Nations common system (*continued*) (A/56/30 and A/56/485)

1. **Mr. Iossifov** (Russian Federation) said that the conclusions and recommendations of the International Civil Service Commission were all the more important at a time when the entire Organization was undergoing major reforms. He was pleased that, after three years of complex consultations, the Commission had completed its work on standards of conduct for the international civil service and had recommended their adoption by the General Assembly. Those standards were contained in a compromise text that reflected the views of the parties concerned in a balanced manner, established basic ethical principles and represented an ideal which each common-system organization would use as it saw fit.

2. The Commission had also reviewed the pay and benefits system in 2001, primarily by means of focus groups. In that connection, his delegation wondered about the effectiveness of the Commission's working on a tripartite basis: when it had tried to cooperate with its partners, the results had not met expectations. The Russian delegation was well aware that the Commission was under constant pressure, but it was important that the desire to cooperate with partners should not reduce the effectiveness of the work of a body that was accountable to the General Assembly. His delegation expected that the Commission would carefully monitor those processes and report to the Assembly, at its fifty-seventh session, on the implementation of its revised rules of procedure, as the Assembly had requested in resolution 53/209, part III, paragraph 5.

3. The importance of the review of the pay and benefits system could not be overstated; accordingly, that exercise required a carefully considered approach. The aim of any reforms in that area should be to enhance the secretariats' effectiveness. It would therefore be premature and illogical to reform the remuneration system in the absence of an effective performance appraisal system, and especially in the absence of a fundamental reform of contractual arrangements at the United Nations, including, in particular, the phasing out of permanent contracts. The Russian delegation firmly believed that the review of the remuneration system should be strictly linked to the debate on the reform of those contractual arrangements, which could speed up staff turnover and facilitate the flexible management of human resources and, more generally, of personnel policies. To date, the Commission had paid insufficient attention to that issue, focusing instead on the review of pay systems in the private sector and national civil services, which were not necessarily models that could be applied to the common-system organizations. The reasons given in that connection did not seem to warrant a revision of the remuneration system. Moreover, the proposals under consideration could have financial implications, which Member States should not ignore in view of the other priorities to which the United Nations would have to allocate resources. It should also be borne in mind that, even without the provision of additional financial resources, there were untapped reserves of efficiency in the organizations' secretariats. Consideration should therefore be given to how the best-performing and most conscientious staff could be rewarded without the use of post reclassifications, and, at the same time, how problems of incompetence and underperformance could be remedied. He recalled, in that connection, that the remuneration system as a whole was well suited to the goals of the Organization and its specialized agencies, offered sufficiently attractive pay levels and maintained an internal balance in the organizations.

4. Overall, the Commission's report for 2001 was balanced and its technical recommendations on the components of the remuneration of staff in the two categories were not contradictory, but the financial implications of its recommendations and decisions in 2001 were cause for concern. With respect to the base/floor salary scale, the Russian delegation noted that there were more and more duty stations (nearly 30 per cent) with no or very low post adjustments, whereas the post adjustment was intended to ensure purchasing power parity among the staff. The Commission should study the possibility of rectifying that situation, which had financial implications for the Member States; in particular, it could consider reducing the base/floor salary scale to eliminate unwarranted expenditure at duty stations with no post adjustment where pay levels actually resulted in greater purchasing power than in the base city, New York.

5. **Mr. Li Taizhang** (China) said that his country actively supported the Commission's efforts to improve the common system. In view of the changes in the way

secretariats functioned and the changes in the international environment, international civil servants had to conform to more precise standards of conduct in order better to serve the ideals set out in the Charter of the United Nations. The revised standards, which were the result of broad consultations, were tailored to the requirements of the new century. The Chinese delegation hoped that they would be continually refined as they were implemented, so that international civil servants remained motivated and maintained a positive image.

6. With regard to the important question of contractual arrangements, the Commission had emphasized that a degree of flexibility should be maintained. The nature of the missions and tasks to be carried out should be considered on a case-by-case basis and should logically determine the nature of the contract, which also depended on the quality of the staff concerned. Permanent contracts had advantages, but they were not an absolute guarantee of greater efficiency. Flexible and diversified solutions were therefore needed so that the organization could rely on a core staff of career civil servants while maintaining competition and removing incompetent staff. China hoped that the Commission would draw up a list of all the existing types of contract, with descriptions and an indication of the number of staff to which they applied, and submit it to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session.

7. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) approved in principle and in their entirety the Commission's conclusions and proposals on the pay and benefits system and standards of conduct. The monitoring systems provided for in paragraphs 8, 13 and 16 of the code of conduct were appropriate. It was right that paragraphs 29 and 30 stated that there should be no interference in the affairs of Member States, but more detail should also be given on the obligation of civil servants to respect the law of the country of their duty station. The statements made by the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System and by the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations had been very useful and should be given due attention.

8. In that light, he was surprised that no representative of the Advisory Committee was present at the meeting. Recalling that he had requested that the Advisory Committee's report on the financial implications of the Commission's decisions and recommendations (A/56/485) should be submitted to the Fifth Committee at a formal meeting, he reserved some of his delegation's comments for the time when that report was submitted.

9. **The Chairman** pointed out that he had already said in a meeting that the Advisory Committee had stated that it had no objections regarding the document in question. Therefore, there would have been no reason for the Chairman or another representative of the Advisory Committee to attend the meeting.

10. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) nonetheless insisted that his delegation's request should be met. The Advisory Committee's report should be distributed in the six languages and introduced orally, if only briefly. More generally, the increasingly frequent departures from procedure were an abuse that should be stopped.

11. **Mr. Blanco Domíngez** (Dominican Republic) endorsed the comments made by the representative of Chile on behalf of the Rio Group and approved the Commission's report, particularly the proposals to reform contractual arrangements so as to create the best possible working conditions to enable the international civil service to attract the best candidates in a competitive environment. He welcomed the progress made concerning the pay and benefits system and hoped that it would be implemented quickly. He also expressed satisfaction at the adoption of the revised version of the standards of conduct for the international civil service and hoped that their implementation would benefit the United Nations system.

12. **Mr. Bel Hadj Amor** (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission), replying to the representatives who had expressed reservations about the initiatives taken by the Commission to simplify the pay and benefits system and make it more flexible, said that any reform gave rise to differing opinions and encountered difficulties. However, he stressed that the Commission would be committed to considering all points of view without exception and would take them into account when it drew up its report.

13. With regard to the comments made by the staff representatives, it should be emphasized that some of the issues raised did not fall within the purview of the Commission and, in view of their bilateral nature, should be considered by the various organizations

concerned. As for the new working methods and rules of procedure drawn up in cooperation with the representatives of the organizations and staff, the Commission had implemented them immediately in anticipation of the return of the staff representatives. In fact, it had already been employing some of those methods for several years, in particular the use of focus groups and working groups.

14. Any real reform aimed at improving efficiency had a human and financial cost and, at the risk of being provocative, he ventured that maintaining the status quo could have greater financial implications than reform, in that the status quo no longer served the interests of the various organizations. Underlining the Commission's determination to contain expenditure and respect fully the Noblemaire and Flemming principles, he said that the aim of the pay and benefits review was to provide the organizations concerned with a system which enabled them to recruit and retain staff of the highest quality, which rewarded staff on the basis of merit and competencies, and which was simpler to administer.

15. **The Chairman**, replying to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, said that his request had been passed on but that, since it had been possible to save writing a report, there was no report to present. The agreement of the Advisory Committee would be noted in the relevant summary records.

16. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the rules of procedure should be respected as a matter of principle. If the Organization had the means to reissue documents in order to rectify errors made by staff, it should not skimp on a report required under the rules. In the case in question, if the Fifth Committee approved the Advisory Committee's recommendation, it would not know to which document it should refer.

17. **Mr. Bel Hadj Amor** (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission) explained that, usually, the Advisory Committee's decisions concerned only the United Nations. That applied to its recommendation on document A/56/485, and the governing bodies of the other organizations should state the financial implications for them of the Commission's recommendations.

18. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that summary records were not reliable enough to be used as a reference for a decision. However, as an exception and in deference to the Chairman of the Commission, he accepted the Chairman's explanation, but emphasized that, in future, no exceptions should be made to the rules of procedure.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.